

**THE STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION ON POLITENESS/
IMPOLITENESS IN INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS
OF COMPLAINTSBY EFL LEARNERS IN UMS**



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by:

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APPROVAL

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JOURNAL ARTICLE

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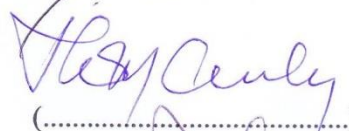
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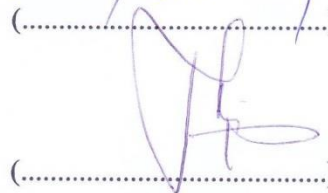
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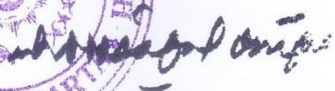
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ABSTRACT

Complaint is one of speech acts which potentially insults the communicators, mainly to complainers. Their understanding on politeness and impoliteness in interlanguage pragmatics of complaint is expected to minimize face threatening act and to lose misunderstanding in communication. This research aims to investigate the EFL learners' understanding on politeness and impoliteness in interlanguage pragmatics of complaints. Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) is chosen as the instrument in collecting data. The writer recruited 25 EFL learners to be respondents in this research. The findings discovered that the EFL learners' understanding on politeness/ impoliteness were not separated from their comprehension on social distance, status level, and imposition degree in their cultural dimension. The social aspects such as pragmalinguistics forms, context situations, and complainers-complainers' relationship of complaint determine politeness/ impoliteness.

Keywords: politeness, impoliteness, interlanguage pragmatics comprehension, complaints

ABSTRAK

Komplain merupakan salah satu ujaran yang berpotensi menghina komunikator, utamanya orang yang dikomplain. Pemahaman mereka terhadap kesantunan dan ketidaksantunan dalam *interlanguage pragmatics* pada komplain diharapkan mampu mengurangi *ancaman wajah* dan menghilangkan kesalahpahaman dalam berkomunikasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti pemahaman pembelajar bahasa Inggris terhadap kesantunan dan ketidaksantunan di dalam komplain pada *interlanguage pragmatics*. Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) dipilih sebagai instrumen dalam pengumpulan data. Penulis merekrut 25 mahasiswa pembelajar bahasa asing menjadi responden dalam penelitian. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa pemahaman mahasiswa pembelajar bahasa asing terhadap kesantunan/ ketidaksantunan tidak dapat dipisahkan dari pemahaman mereka terhadap jarak sosial, tingkatan status, dan tingkatan kesalahan dalam dimensi budaya mereka. Aspek-aspek sosial, misalkan bentuk-bentuk pragmalinguistik, konteks situasi, dan hubungan antara pengkomplain dan orang yang dikomplain menentukan bentuk kesantunan dan ketidaksantunan.

Kata kunci: kesantunan, ketidaksantunan, pemahaman interlanguage pragmatics, komplain

1. INTRODUCTION

In understanding cross-cultural and interpersonal communication, the communicators have to comprehend the meaning as well as convey the utterance. A misunderstanding in communication happens when one of the aspects or both of them are not accomplished. There are some consequences of misunderstanding in communication such as insulting the communicators' feeling, threatening face, raising the offense, emerging awkwardness in communication, etc. Complaint is a speech act that potentially appearing impoliteness in communication. Speech act of complaint generally performs displeasure or unhappiness as the result of particular offense.

Knowing that speech act of complaint able to cause an offense, then some strategies are required to prevent a personal conflict in communication between the complainer and the complainees. Although a complaint is categorized as non-polite act, a complainer can choose to smooth the complaint in order to reduce the impact of his/ her complaint to the complainees (Trosborg, 1995).

The previous researchers have conducted research on politeness study such as politeness strategies made by the language learners and comparative study of politeness theories (e.g. Cajnko, 2016; and Dickey, 2016). The others have investigated speech acts variation of interlanguage pragmatics production, mainly on complaint (e.g. Kakolaki & Shahroki, 2016). Some others have examined EFL learners' development and comprehension in their interlanguage pragmatics but not as many as interlanguage production researches (e.g. Zangoei, 2014).

However, the study, which examines EFL learners' comprehension on politeness and impoliteness in ILP mainly concerning with pragmalinguistics forms, social contexts, and complainers-complainees relationship is still rarely discussed. Based on the gap, the researcher interest examining the students' comprehension on politeness and impoliteness in the interlanguage pragmatics of complaint. The researcher chooses complaint expression because this expression is potentially raise impoliteness.

The research problem in this research is "Do EFL learners in UMS comprehend politeness/impoliteness used in complaint?" Derived from the

problem, the writer formulates some research questions, namely: 1) how do EFL learners relate the pragmalinguistics form of complaints to politeness/impoliteness? 2) how do EFL learners associate the context situations of interlanguage complaints to politeness/impoliteness? and 3) how do the EFL learners correlate the complainers – complainees relationship to politeness/impoliteness?

Complaint was an offensive expression uttered by complainers and potentially created face threatening act as the consequence of unpleasant action done by the complainees (e.g Murphy & Neu, 1996). Regarding complaint was an abusive act and could raise an impoliteness, some experts proposed politeness strategies to avoid an impolite complaint (e.g Grice & Thomas in Fauziati, 2009; Lakoff in Fauziati, 2009; and Brown & Levinson in Song, 2012).

The previous studies have explored strategies of politeness used by EFL learners in their interlanguage pragmatics of complaint. Some of the researchers have found variation of politeness strategies made by EFL learners in their utterance (e.g. Cajnko, 2016; Kadar, 2012). They have also compared the role of politeness, the politeness theories and the factors, which have influenced politeness production (e.g. Dickey, 2016; Kadar, 2012). The other researchers have investigated interlanguage pragmatics production in which has found some variations of complaint produced by EFL learners (e.g. Seykh & Esmaeli, 2015, Abdolrezapour et.al, 2012).

There were a lot of previous studies who examined politeness strategies used by EFL learners in complaining. However, their comprehension on politeness/ impoliteness itself was still rarely discussed. On the present study, the writer used politeness and impoliteness taxonomy to examine the EFL learners' understanding to politeness/ impoliteness. Politeness taxonomy, such Grice (1975); Lakoff (1960); and Brown-Levinson (1987) used to observe the EFL learners' understanding to politeness. Meanwhile Culpeper's (1996)impoliteness taxonomy that supported by Bousfield (2008) used to confirm the EFL learners' understanding to politeness.

1.1 Politeness

Linguistic politeness has become fundamental aspect that cannot be separated in communication. To make good relationships, communicators have to take into account toward the politeness strategies include cross-cultural communication. A politeness is usually we call as someone's good behavior. There were some indicators that imply people are polite, such as they show respectful act toward their superior, they are always helpful, and they speak really well or they use polite language, etc (Fauziati, 2009). The different socio-culture influences different criteria of politeness. Regarding English socio –culture, a polite language is signed by using indirect speech, using respectful forms of address system like, *Sir, Madam*, or using formelic utterances such *please, excuse me, sorry, thank you, etc* (Fauziati, 2009: 193). In this section, the writer tries to review some of the most widely used models of linguistic politeness that proposed by (1) Grice, (2) Lakoff, and (3) Brown & Levinson.

Grice in Fauziati (2009) proposed four major maxims namely *quantity, quality, relation, and manner*. *Maxim quantity* means that the communicators have to be as informative as required. *Maxim quality* means the communicators have to give a true nformation which has been proven its validity. *Maxim of relation* asserts that the communicator have to be relevant with the purpose of conversation, and *maxim of manner* asserts that the communicators have to convey a clear information and avoiding ambiguous.

Whereas, Lakoff in Fauziati (2009) suggested two overarching rules of Pragmatic Competence, in which be composed into a set of sub rules, namely *be clear* and *be polite*. The Rule 1 (*be clear*) is adopted from Gricean Cooperative Principle, which she renames as the 'rules of conversation'. Rule 2 (*be polite*) is divided into three rules, R1: Don't impose, R2: Give options; and R3: Make addressee feel good – be friendly.

Brown and Levinson in Fauziati (2009: 201) argued that "politeness principles are principled reasons for deviation from the cooperative principles when communication is about to threaten face."

They see politeness in terms of conflict avoidance. The central themes are rationality and face, which are claimed to be universal features, i.e. possessed by all speakers and hearers. The most famous politeness terms proposed by Brown & Levinson were Face saving Theory and Face Threatening Act. Face saving theory claims that most speech acts inherently threaten either the hearer's or the speaker's face want whether it is positive face or negative face. An individual positive face is reflected in his desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated by the others. Meanwhile, an individual negative face is reflected in his desire not to be impeded or put upon, to have the freedom to act as one chooses. Moreover, there were 4 strategies for performing face threatening acts (FTA) that proposed by Brown and Levinson, namely: say thing as it is (bald- on record), off record, on record positive politeness and negative politeness, remain silent/ say nothing/ do not perform FTA (Brown-Levinson in Fauziati, 2009). Furthermore Brown and Levinson in Song (2012) states that there are three social variables in politeness namely (1) the distance between the speaker and the hearer; (2) the relative power between the communicator, and (3) the imposition of the task/ act.

1.2 Impoliteness

Impoliteness strategies stand for the opposite of politeness super-strategies. They are opposite in terms of orientation to face. If the politeness strategies refer to the way to support or redress face want, impoliteness super-strategies refer to attack face want (Culpeper: 1996). Impoliteness strategies emerge when inequality of power degree of the participants. The fact that impoliteness is more likely to occur in situation where there is an imbalance of power is reflected in its relatively frequent appearance in courtroom discourse (Lakoff & Penman in Culpeper,1996: 354). Bousfield (2008) defined impoliteness as the opposite of politeness, in which impoliteness prefers to compose the communication of intentionally unnecessary and conflictive verbal face threatening acts (FTAs) rather than seeking to soften face-threatening acts (FTAs). Furthermore, Bousfield (2008) stated successful impoliteness can be done

when the intention of the speaker (or author) to offend (threaten/ damage face) must be comprehend by the listener.

Culpeper (1996) proposed five-point model of offensive superstrategies (impoliteness) inspired by Brown and Levinson's politeness superstrategies. The impoliteness classifications were adapted by Bousfield (2008). These are impoliteness strategies combined from Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008), namely: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness or off – record impoliteness, and withhold impoliteness.

2 METHODS

2.1 Participants

The researcher recruited post-graduate students of language studies in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta to be respondents in this research. They are EFL learners ranged 22-28 years old and had been exposed English in a long time. They were consisted of 25 respondents who taken from the first, the second, and the third semester students.

2.2 Data collection

The data had been collected in two ways. The first one was by using discourse completion task (DCT). This technique had become familiar technique of data collection in interlanguage pragmatics research. The second one was interviews that built the information toward the EFL learners' understanding on politeness/ impoliteness in the interlanguage pragmatics of complaint by recording the students' statements.

The discourse completion task (DCT) were provided as related as possible to the EFL learners socio-cultural situations. It consisted of nine scenarios that relevant with the EFL learners' behavior. Each of them reflected various status level (high- equal- low) and social distances (lose – familiar – unfamiliar).

The second method of collecting data is interview. The writer conducted interview with 25 respondents. One session of interview need 15 up to 20 minutes. The questions in interview investigate the EFL learners' comprehension about politeness/ impoliteness based on three research variables, namely pragmalinguistics forms, context situations, and

complainers-complainees' relationship. The writer asked the respondents to explain more about their judgement on DCT scenarios by emphasizing their comprehension on politeness and impoliteness.

2.3 Data Analysis

The writer researcher analyzed the data by using following steps:

- 2.3.1 analyzing the students' comprehension of politeness/ impoliteness based on pragmalinguistic forms using Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies, Lakoff's (1960) R1: *Don't impose* politeness strategies and Culpeper (1996) impoliteness strategies,
- 2.3.2 analyzing the students' comprehension of politeness/ impoliteness based on context situation using Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies and socio-cultural variable, namely the imposition of degree (Rx), and Grice's (1975) maxim of relation. Meanwhile, Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies used to analyze the students' comprehension of politeness/ impoliteness based on context situation,
- 2.3.3 analyzing the students' comprehension of politeness/ impoliteness based on complainers- complainees' relationship using Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies and socio-cultural variables, namely distance (D) and power (P) and Culpeper (1996) impoliteness strategies.

3 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Findings

The research findings discovered the answers of the research questions. It was review what the data anaysis performed. It provided general overview of the results which were found in the data analysis. Here were the findings:

3.1.1 The students' understanding to politeness/ impoliteness on the pragmalinguistics form in ILP of complaints

Regarding politeness overview, the writer assumed that EFL learners able to correlate their politeness norms into Brown - Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies. Bald- on record politeness was performed by *giving honest reasons*. Off-record politeness

was shown by *using hints to soften the complaints*. The using of word *“please” to appreciate the listener* determined as positive politeness category, whereas the *using modal “could” to keep the listener’s privacy*, *the using phrase “excuse me” to lengthen social*, and *the using sentence “I’m sorry” to keep the listener’s freedom* represented negative politeness strategy. Lakoff’s (1960) politeness rule was also reflected by *avoiding imposing / demanding the listener*. Moreover, some politeness rules were added derived from the EFL learners’ understanding on politeness in their cultural dimension, such as *omitting interjection (high tone)*, *avoiding blaming the others*, and *avoiding insulting the others*. In the pragmalinguistics forms, the most EFL learners’ understanding about politeness lends support to Brown-Levinson politeness strategies (214 data). It was followed by the new variation of politeness that proposed by the EFL learners (29 data). Meanwhile, in assessing a politeness level, the learners (3 data) rarely used Lakoff’s politeness strategy.

Dealing with impoliteness, the EFL learners’ understanding to impoliteness was divided into two major categories, namely understanding to Culpeper’s (1996) impoliteness strategies and understanding to impoliteness rules in their culture. Culpeper’s (1996) impoliteness strategies was shown by bald on record impoliteness, such *giving direct statements*, off-record impoliteness such *using hints to threaten implicitly*, and negative impoliteness such *omitting phrase “excuse me” to lengthen social distance*. Additionally, the EFL learners had different understanding to impoliteness which was reflected by their culture, such as *using imposing/ demanding utterance*, *using interjection (high tone)*, and *blaming the others*. Culpeper impoliteness strategies were the dominant types of the EFL learners’ point of view on impoliteness (42 data). It was followed by the new variation of impoliteness that determined by the learners (35 data).

3.1.2 The students' understanding to politeness/ impoliteness on the context situations in ILP of complaints

Based on context situation, EFL learners' understanding about politeness was consisted with Grice's (1957) maxim relation, such as *being relevant to the context*. Another way that used by EFL learners to assess a politeness was in line with Brown-Levinson (1987) off record, such *using hints to soften the complaint*. Additionally, the learners had different understanding about politeness, that was *using polite request, avoiding anger, avoiding blaming the others, avoiding offending the others, the other making serious offense, and no serious problem*. The most dominant of learners understanding to politeness on the context situation was their new variation of politeness point of view based on the EFL learners' cultural knowledge (144 data). The less dominant was Brown-Levinson's politeness strategies, namely off record (19 data) and the lowest dominant was Grice's maxim of relation (18 data). In understanding politeness based on context situation, the EFL learners also considered the degree of imposition on the context situation. The degree of imposition also determined whether the complaint was polite or not.

In the other hand, the EFL learners correlated context situation to impoliteness by Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies, namely bald on record impoliteness i.e *using direct statement*, off – record impoliteness i.e *using hints to threaten implicitly*, and negative impoliteness i.e *do not keep the listener's privacy*. Their culture knowledge also influenced the assessment of impoliteness such *using imposing/ demanding utterances, blaming the others and expanding the problems*. Both Culpeper's impoliteness strategies and the new variations of impoliteness point of view were balance. Culpeper's impoliteness strategies are more little dominant (27 data) than the EFL learners' new variations of impoliteness point of view (26 data).

3.1.3 The students' understanding about politeness/ impoliteness on the complainers-complainees' relationship in ILP of complaints

Dealing with complainers- complainees' relationship, the EFL learners' understanding about politeness was consisted with Brown-Levinson's (1987) bald on record and negative politeness. Bald on record was represented by *using exposed language to close persons*. Negative politeness was signed by *using polite language to familiar, unfamiliar, lower status, equal status, and higher status persons*. There were no off record, positive politeness and withhold impoliteness existed on the EFL learners' comprehension. In the complainers-complainees' relationship, all of EFL learners associated politeness to Brown-Levinson politeness strategies. Most of them were understand about negative impoliteness by relating social distance and status level of communicators (152 data). The others associated politeness to bald on record politeness (20 data). The EFL learners' understanding about politeness also considered socio-cultural variable, such distance of the complaineers-complainees and power of them.

Regarding impoliteness aspect, the EFL learners' understanding was in line with Culpeper's (1996) bald on record and negative impoliteness theory. The bald on record impoliteness represented by *using rude language to close persons* and *using exposed language to familiar persons*. Whereas negative impoliteness reflected by the *using of impolite language to unfamiliar persons and higher status persons*. The frequency of Culpeper's impoliteness strategies such bald on record (17 data) was lower than negative impoliteness (43 data).

3.2 Discussion

The present finding supports the previous studies (e.g Yarahmadi and Fathi, 2015 and Canjko, 2016). The previous studies have conducted research about the politeness strategies in interlanguage pragmatic production. Meanwhile, the present study conducts a research about politeness and impoliteness in interlanguage pragmatic comprehension.

Although they were different in the objectives of the studies, the studies found there were influences of the three variables, namely social distance, status level, and imposition degree in interlanguage pragmatics of complaint.

Other previous research (e.g. Wijayanto, et al., 2013) have examined EFL learners' complaints production and have clasified them by using Brown-Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies. The result showed that the EFL learners' politeness strategies were consistent with Brown-Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies. The present research enlarges the previous research (Wijayanto, et al., 2013). It finds that the EFL learners' comprehension on politeness is also in line with with Brown-Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies.

The present study lends support the literature review which declared that complaint was an offensive expression that uttered by complainers and potentially created face threatening act as the consequence of unpleasant action which done by the complainees (e.g. Trosborg, 1995; Murphy & Neu, 1996). Regarding complaint was an abusive act and could raise an impoliteness, some experts proposed politeness strategies to avoid an impolite complaint (e.g. Grice & Thomas in Fauziati, 2009; Lakoff in Fauziati, 2009; Brown & Levinson in Song, 2012). Politeness strategies employed by the complainers depended on three social variable, namely social distance, social power, and imposition degree (Brown & Levinson in Song, 2012). The present findings were in line with the study. It found that the EFL learners correlate those three social aspects in determining a politeness looking from complainers-complainees' relationship aspect. A politeness happened when the complainers avoid to give instruction into the complainees as the consequences of long distance (Lakoff in Fauziati, 2009). The present finding was in line with the studies. It found the EFL leaners understand that by *avoiding imposing or demanding the listeners* can convey politeness in the communication. Furthermore, Grice in Watt (2003) argued that to be polite, the interactants should make their contributions relevant to the purposes of the overall conversation. The present study

lends support the previous study and discovered that the EFL learners understand a politeness can be created by being relevant to the context situation. However, the EFL learners in the present study also had different understandings on politeness that were determined as new variations in understanding politeness. It was influenced by their cultural dimension.

4 CONCLUSION

Derived from research findings above, the writer concluded that the EFL learners' understanding about politeness/ impoliteness had been influenced by their cultural dimension such considering social distance, status level, and imposition degree. Thus, they considered those social aspects to correlate pragmalinguistics forms, context situations, and complainers-complainees' relationship of complaint to politeness/ impoliteness. In pragmalinguistics forms, the EFL learners understood that utterances such "*could*", "*excuse me*", and "*I'm sorry*" can minimize FTA (face threatening act). In contrast, they assumed that omitting phrase "excuse me" increased FTA (face threatening act) and emerging impolite complaint.

Regarding context situation, The EFL learners considered imposition degree as determines whether a complaint was polite or not. A small imposition degree was usually raising polite complaint. Whereas, a huge imposition degree was usually creating impolite complaint. Finally, The EFL learners understood that complainers-complainees' relationship manipulated politeness and impoliteness in expressing complaint. An unfamiliar social distance and higher status level made complaint to be more polite than a close social distance and lower status level

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